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Message Text

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S E C R E T JERUSALEM 0655

EXDIS (HANDLE AS NODIS)

U.S. DEL NO. 66

FROM ATHERTON

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, XF, US
SUBJ: MEETING WITH PRESIDENT SADAT -- MARCH 6

1. I HAD HOUR AND HALF MEETING WITH SADAT THIS EVENING, FOLLOWING WHICH WE IMMEDIATELY TOOK OFF FOR JERUSALEM. I AM GETTING THIS BRIEF REPORT OFF TONIGHT WITH DETAILED MEMCON TO FOLLOW TOMORROW.
2. SADAT WAS IN EXPANSIVE AND POSITIVE FRAME OF MIND. WHEN I GAVE HIM BEGIN'S REPLY TO HIS LETTER HE READ IT INTENTLY BUT MADE NO IMMEDIATE COMMENT EXCEPT TO SAY CALMLY "SAME OLD ARGUEMENTS." LATER IN THE CONVERSATION HE SAID HE THOUGHT BEGIN WOULD TRY TO "EXPLOIT" THIS EXCHANGE DURING HIS VISIT TO WASHINGTON AND HE WOULD THEREFORE SEND A REPLY TO BEGIN IMMEDIATELY (IN TIME FOR MY MEETING WITH BEGIN TUESDAY EVENING) "ANSWERING CERTAIN POINTS." HE WOULD ALSO BE SENDING, WE UNDERSTOOD HIM TO SAY, A MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT CARTER ABOUT THE BEGIN LETTER, ALTHOUGH HE THEN LAUNCHED INTO AN EXTENDED MONOLOGUE ASKING ME
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REPEATEDLY TO "CONVEY THIS TO PRESIDENT CARTER" LEAVING ME A LITTLE UNCERTAIN WHETHER IN FACE WE WILL BE GETTING ANYTHING MORE.

3. GIST OF MONOLOGUE WAS THAT SADAT HAD MADE UNPARALLELED CONCESSIONS IN OFFERING PEACE TO ISRAEL WHICHE SHOULD MAKE PREISDENT CARTER'S JOB OF CONFRONTING ISRAEL

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

ON THE ESSENTIAL ISSUES EASIER. PUBLIC OPINION EVERYWHERE
WAS SWINGING TO HIS SIDE. HE RELATED AT LENGTH HIS
RECENT MEETING WITH JEWISH FINANCIERS IN EUROPE
AND HOW THEY HAD OFFERED HIM SUPPORT IN SPITE OF BEGIN'S
ATTEMPT TO KEEP THEM FROM MEETING HIM. SECOND
PART OF MONOLOGUE FOCUSED ON SITUATION IN HORN OF AFRICA.
SADAT SAID SOVIET AND CUBAN TROOPS WERE NOW OPENLY FIGHTING
FOR ETHIOPIA AND AS FAR AS SOVIETS WERE CONCERNED IT
WAS UNPRECEDENTED FOR THEM TO COMMIT TROOPS OUTSIDE
WARSAW PACT AREA. HE SAID HE EXPECTED SOVIETS WITHIN FEW MONTHS
TO LAUNCH OPERATION AGAINST SUDAN FROM CHAD ON ONE SIDE, WHERE
QUADAFI WAS COOPERATING WITH THEM, AND FROM ERTITREA. SADAT SAID
"WITHIN A FEW MONTHS I WILL BE FIGHTING THEM" AND HE AGAIN
MADE PLEA FOR THE U.S. TO EXERT ITSELF TO ACHIEVE MIDDLE
EAST PEACE SO "THE FRIENDS OF AMERICA" CAN
STEM THE SOVIET ADVANCE IN AFRICA.

4. SADAT GAVE US PAPER ON WEST BANK/GAZA (FOR U.S. EYES ONLY)
WHICH OBVIOUSLY IS PRODUCT OF FOREIGN MINISTRY AND
IS REPETITION OF STANDARD EGYPTIAN LINE WITH NO
NEW OR UNEXPECTED ELEMENTS. WE WILL CABLE TEXT TOMORROW.

5. COMMENT: WHILE SADAT STRESSED THAT HE WOULD BE
CALM AND PATIENT, IT CAME THROUGH UNMISTAKABLY THAT HE SEES BEGIN
VISIT TO WASHINGTON AS MAJOR TEST OF U.S. RESOLVE TO STICK
FIRMLY TO ITS DECLARED POSITIONS ON ISSUES WHERE IT DIFFERS
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WITH ISRAEL. IN RESPONSE TO MY URGING THAT HE NOT
EXPECT DRAMATIC BREAKTHROUGHS DURING VISIT, HE SAID
HE UNDERSTOOD THIS; HE DID NOT LOOK FOR INSTANT RESULTS
BUT ASSURANCES THAT USG WOULD STICK TO ITS GUNS.
AMONG SADAT'S ADVISERS, NERVOUSNESS WAS EVEN MORE EVIDENT.
KAMEL EMPHASIZED THAT EGYPT IS NOT LOOKING FOR PUBLIC
U.S.-ISRAELI SHOWDOWN BUT EVIDENCE THAT U.S. WOULD MAKE CLEAR
PRIVATELY THAT BEGIN VISIT WAS A "TURNING POINT" AWAY FROM
U.S. WILLINGNESS TO SUPPORT ISRAEL NO MATTER HOW FIRMLY
IT HELD TO POSITIONS CONTRARY TO U.S. VIEWS. IN RESPONSE TO
KAMEL'S STATEMENT THAT EGYPT WOULD WAIT UNTIL AFTER BEGIN
VISIT TO SUBMIT FURTHER PROPOSALS ON DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES,
I URGED HE RECONSIDER AND KEEP NEGOTIATIONS ON DECLARATION GOING.
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